

Adrenal health

Natural treatments for adrenal imbalance — restoring the energy you thought was lost

by *Marcelle Pick, OB/GYN NP*

Low energy is something I've noticed many women succumb to. They wonder, "It's just part of getting older, right?" Well, it's not. It's not natural to feel fatigued purely as a function of your age. And as long as there are no major health issues causing your fatigue, we can absolutely get you back to feeling as energetic and vibrant as you did in your younger years. Often it's a matter of learning how to better support your *adrenal glands*, two plum-sized but powerful glands that many women have never even heard of.

Chief among several key roles they play, your adrenal glands' primary responsibility is to help you react — and survive — in the face of stress. Directly in-sync with your body and mind, they respond to every kind of stress: physical, emotional, perceived, psychological, environmental, infectious, or any combination of these. Unfortunately, conventional medicine has very little to offer women with adrenal imbalance unless they're diagnosed with a full-blown adrenal disease, such as rare disorders like Cushing's syndrome or Addison's disease.

Are your adrenals imbalanced?

If the answer to more than one of these questions is yes, you may consider talking to a functional medicine practitioner about your adrenal glands.

- Are you always on the run?
- Do you feel like you "can never do enough"?
- Does everything seem like it's a whole lot harder for you than it should be?
- Do you find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning?
- Do you use caffeine or sugar to bolster your flagging energy in the afternoon?
- Do you feel weary and irritable much of the time?
- Do you often crave salty foods or binge on sugar?
- Do you fall asleep while reading or while watching movies?
- Do you struggle to "come down" at night so you can get to sleep?

But whether you feel worn and weary, tired and wired, or jacked-up 24/7, you may have an overactive or underactive stress response and there's a pathway back to balance for you, I promise! If it's time to take an honest look at your [adrenal health](#), you've come to the right place.



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There are many natural treatment options at your fingertips, options that can help restore your energy and balance your adrenal output so you can feel like yourself again.

Herbs work *with us*, not against us

What's the first thing you reach for when you need energy? For some it's a cup of coffee or a soda. For others, it's a treat that involves sugar or white flour. As much as you may savor your three o'clock latte or chocolate chip cookie, the caffeine and sugar buzz they cause your adrenals to pump out more stress hormones, eventually leaving your body more drained than it would have been without your "pick-me-up."

There's a much healthier way to bring your energy back — one that *supports* your adrenals rather than depleting them. *Phytotherapy* is the time-honored practice of using plants, either in whole-food form or in standardized extracts and supplements, for the purpose of healing. People around the world have practiced botanical medicine and followed a plant-based diet for thousands of years. But now we have evidence-based research to back up phytotherapy's treatment benefits.

For example, researchers in the US and around the globe have demonstrated that the herb *eleuthero* (aka "Siberian ginseng") supports the adrenal glands with its anti-fatigue and anti-stress properties. In 2009, Swedish researchers proposed one way it does this: by increasing the specific molecules we typically release to protect the body against physical and emotional stress. These "molecular chaperones" help treat and repair damaged proteins during times of intense physical demand. Having more "repair" molecules on board helps build our tolerance to stress and allows for less physical destruction. In Australia, another team demonstrated how *eleuthero* inhibits the binding of stress hormones to their receptors (see the illustration of adaptogenic receptor-blocking in my article on [phytotherapy for hormonal imbalance](#)).

Adrenal drain can deplete the whole body

As our adrenals encounter and thwart more and more stress without replenishment, many things can happen in the body. In addition to their primary role in dealing with stress, your adrenal glands:

- balance more than 50 hormones in your body
- synthesize their own hormones, including stress and sex hormones
- help regulate blood pressure and heart beat regularity
- help balance blood sugar levels
- help quell inflammation throughout the body
- support nervous system function (behavior, mood, excitability, memory, clarity of thought)

Because the adrenals are intimately linked to so *many* other systems in our bodies, women with exhausted adrenals can end up with [weight gain](#), [fuzzy thinking](#), insomnia, severe fatigue, thyroid disorders, and accelerated aging. For more on the connection between adrenals and thyroid, see our article on [hypothyroidism in menopause](#).

[References.](#)

And there's more — new science is uncovering how eleuthero bolsters the immune response, dampens inflammation, enhances mental clarity and nervous system function, helps to regulate blood sugar, and may even benefit bone remodeling by increasing the amount of a hormone called osteocalcin in the blood.

I'm pleased to report that scores of my multitasking, overworked patients have experienced benefit from using adaptogenic herbs such as eleuthero and other supplements with adrenal-supportive properties! These days many of us have been conditioned to expect immediate results, so when a therapy isn't working right away we might assume it doesn't work at all. Because of its gentle effects, phytotherapy and mineral supplementation may take time to work with your body. And what works for one woman may not work for another, and the diverse plant world offers us many options to explore — so don't give up!

Medicinal herbs and supplements for adrenal imbalance — our suggestions

I've seen how worn-out adrenals can affect the whole body, and promise you that natural support implemented before something else goes wrong may save you from a more serious diagnosis. Thankfully, there are a number of safe and supportive herbs and supplements to help you with this. Here are some of the herbs I've used with success at the clinic for treating my patients. Remember to listen to your body, and to monitor your progress as you experiment with a natural approach. We all react differently to therapeutic agents. If you know you are sensitive, vary your dosages accordingly, and consider working with an experienced herbalist.



- **Astragalus root (*A. membranaceus*)**. Astragalus aids in the body's natural ability to adapt to stress, bolstering the immune system so you stay well while helping to regulate normal blood sugar levels and alleviate insulin resistance.



- **Cordyceps (*C. sinensis*)**. Cordyceps is a prized antioxidant fungus that can slow aging and take a load off the adrenals by supporting the immune system, balancing the inflammatory response and helping to stabilize blood sugar.



- **Eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*, formerly called Siberian ginseng)**. As I mentioned above, eleuthero is an adaptogenic herb that can help protect us against the negative effects of stress, while decreasing fatigue, enhancing mental clarity, helping to balance blood sugar, and even perhaps supporting bone remodeling as well.



- ***Rhodiola rosea* (“golden root”)**. Rhodiola is another adaptogenic herb that protects against stress-related fatigue and “burnout”; increases mental clarity; and offers immune and blood sugar support. An added benefit of Rhodiola is its antidepressant and anti-anxiety effects.



- **Licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)**. Well known for supporting adrenal balance, licorice root aids in increasing energy and endurance. Though many of the above herbs can be used relatively freely of restrictions, certain forms of licorice can increase blood pressure and lower potassium and thus, licorice should be used with care and guidance. Adrenal fatigue, in many instances, is accompanied by low blood pressure, so licorice taken at the appropriate times and dosages can be of benefit in those cases. However, this herb is best taken under the care of an herbalist or a functional medicine practitioner.

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As an integrative medical practitioner I’ve often found that there is strength in diversity. Talk to an experienced herbalist, naturopath, or functional medicine practitioner about what you’re experiencing, and work together to find the right combination for you. Depending on your symptoms, you may need a remedy that helps provide you with more energy, one that helps prepare you for better rest, or a little of both. An approach that combines natural supplemental support, sound nutritional choices, and one-on-one lifestyle guidance — like the options offered in our [Personal Program for Adrenal Health](#) — is what has brought the greatest relief to the many wonderful women I have cared for over the years.

Real support, not just a one-size-fits-all solution

Just as we’ve come to expect immediate results, we’ve been convinced that there are one-size-fits-all solutions. It’s important to remember that phytotherapy isn’t a magic bullet, either. It simply gives us the energy and support we need to take steps toward healing the adrenals. To fully recover requires us to face and address the causes of stress in our lives.

I had a patient whose toddler son was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes and needed constant care after a frightening stay in the hospital. My patient was exhausted from lack of sleep, began to gain weight, and noticed her own blood sugar creeping up into prediabetes territory. When we started her on a combination herbal/mineral supplement, she quickly felt much better. But she felt so much better that she went overboard: she joined a gym, took on more responsibilities at work and at home, and started writing a book! When I talked with her a few weeks ago, I encouraged her to slow down, and explained that the herbal support was just one piece to healing her adrenals. Even though you may feel infinitely better after starting phytotherapy, adrenal health comes from creating conditions that sustain not just physical health but emotional and spiritual wellness, too.

This will often lead us on a path of discovery, to learn new ways of “being.” But you don’t have to reinvent yourself — even small shifts in your everyday habits can help. Here are some other supportive lifestyle measures you can take to ensure a full adrenal recovery:

- **Sleep.** Resist the temptation to burn the candle at both ends! Getting 8-10 hours a night of sleep is one of the best ways to restore your adrenal glands. It’s best to turn in early if you can. Drink herbal tea or consider a natural herbal supplement to help you wind down. And if you need one and can, take a nap during the day.
- **Modify your exercise.** Some of my patients feel great after they exercise. If this is you, stick with it. Others feel drained with exercise and it’s important to take it slow. Mornings are best for aerobic exercise because this is when your cortisol is naturally highest, but try not to let your heart rate go above 90 beats per minute. I recommend relaxing walks, yoga, or any kind of exercise that restores you instead of draining you.
- **Eat well and often.** I have written in the past about how to [eat to support your adrenal glands](#). Eating certain foods, and at specific times of the day can help you return to a natural cortisol rhythm and avoid the “crash and burn” of sugar/caffeine highs and lows. One important point: a hungry body puts stress on the adrenals, so don’t let yourself go too long without a meal or a snack.
- **Relieve stress.** Schedule a massage or enlist a partner or friend to give you one; practice yoga, t’ai chi or qi gong; put up your feet and enjoy a cup of tea; or call a loved one just to talk. Cultivate the practices that best relieve tension and stress for you. Even just five minutes a day of quiet breathing or meditation can do wonders for your adrenals.
- **Play.** Take a good look at your life, and let go of as many of the things that drain you as possible, replacing them with those that fulfill you. Engage with the people, activities, and work you most enjoy: go to the beach, play with your grandchildren, go dancing — whatever you have fun doing, give yourself permission to do it during this time of healing. Your adrenals will soak these experiences up with pleasure.

Get your energy back — naturally

In a world where women are expected to do more and more, but can “never do enough,” I know it’s difficult to keep up. But you don’t have to continue relying on sugar, carbs, and caffeine to make it through the day. And you certainly don’t have to feel so tired and miserable anymore. Help is on the way! There are natural herbal options for adrenal support to boost your energy, prevent further health issues, and put you back on the path to adrenal health and lifelong balance.

Our NEW Personal Program for Adrenal Health — for the symptoms of stress

Our popular Personal Program can help you manage the effects of stress by relieving your symptoms and promoting natural adrenal balance. We’ve created custom protocols to address each woman’s specific adrenal profile, with our exclusive adrenal support formulas, advanced nutritional supplements, and practical dietary and lifestyle guidance to maximize your results.

- Choose our [risk-free trial](#) if you're ready for relief now. If you're not satisfied, you'll get a prompt refund — no questions asked.
- Go to [How the Personal Program works](#) to learn more about the Program and each protocol.
- Take our revealing on-line [Adrenal Health Profile](#) to learn more about your adrenal burden.

This amazing Program is a convenient, at-home version taken directly from our recommendations to adrenal health patients at our clinic. If you have questions and want to talk to a real person — call us toll-free at **1-800-214-3484**. Or e-mail us at personalprogram@womentowomen.com